

## **Thanksgiving Eve**

November 26, 2014

Haven Lutheran Church Hagerstown, MD

Readings: Deuteronomy 8: 7-18; Psalm 65; Luke 17: 11-19

*Grace and peace to you from God - Father, Son, Holy Spirit –Amen*

A few days before Thanksgiving an elderly man in Phoenix called his son in New York and said to him, "I hate to ruin your day, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are divorcing. Forty-five years of misery is enough. We're sick of each other. So you call your sister in Chicago and tell her."

Frantic, the son called his sister, who exploded on the phone. "Like heck they're getting divorced," she shouted, "I'll take care of this." She called Phoenix immediately, and said to her father. "You are NOT getting divorced. Don't do a single thing until I get there. I'm calling my brother back, and we'll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don't do a thing, DO YOU HEAR ME?"

The man hung up his phone and turned to his wife. "Okay, honey. The kids are coming for Thanksgiving... even paying for their own way."

I have a feeling when that daughter and son arrive in Phoenix; they may not know whether or not to be thankful for their Dad. But there are many things in which we cannot see a blessing at the time. There are many occasions when we can't imagine anything good coming for it. Then there are the times we're just blind to a gift right in front of us because we're preoccupied or it comes from a most unexpected person.

There were ten lepers who had to live on the edge of life. They had to keep their distance from family, friends, and life as they may have known it. When Jesus comes by they make their plea for healing. Jesus tells them to go show themselves to the priests who will certify their healing so they can return to their family and homes. They run off

and, somewhere along the way, all ten find themselves free of leprosy. Nine continue on to do what Jesus instructed them to do. One turns around. One ends up bowed down in front of Jesus in humble gratitude. Did Jesus seem surprised because all ten didn't return or because this one, Samaritan did? What we do know is that Jesus is moved by this man who postponed any family reunion to come back to Jesus. Was it simply good manners — his mother taught him well to say, "thank you"? Maybe. Did he return because he realized this was a holy moment in time, in his life and instead of rushing by, he wanted to give it notice in the now? Perhaps. Or did the cured Samaritan leper realize that he had encountered the presence of God in Jesus and he wanted to return to bask in that presence again? Maybe a blend of them all.

Jesus lifts up this one leper as an example of faith, a faith that has made him well. It seems such a peculiar thing to say. The man's faith hadn't cured him. Jesus did that for him and the other nine. What was it Jesus said about the man? Was none found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner." Returns and give praise to God" is what Jesus calls an act of faith. Turning and giving praise to God is an act of faith that makes us well, makes us whole. Why is that?

First and foremost it means we turn to God — not ourselves or lady luck. We know who the source of all that is good is and we turn to God in that moment like a sunflower toward the sun. "It's you, Lord, isn't it?" our soul murmurs in wonder. Then we can't help but give praise, give thanks for being in the very heart of God's heart. Part of faith is recognizing God in a blessing and savoring God's presence in praise.

We've spent a month here at Haven remembering people for whom we are grateful. Those who have died but so enriched our lives. Those living friends or family

who add something wonderful to our lives. We named those who do a job that is rarely acknowledged but we would miss their efforts if they stopped. Last Sunday, we remembered people from our church families who inspired us and helped us to know the love of God. It was an exercise of gratitude and we've a tree full of thanks. We did something similar at the Sunday School's Family and Friend Sunday. The children and youth gave thanks for little and great things but most were not satisfied to put just one slip of thanks on our sheep of blessing. And isn't that the crux of coming together once a year, on a day of Thanksgiving ---- To remember and be reminded of God's grace and bounty in our lives? Or as we heard in Deuteronomy "Take care that you do not forget the LORD your God"

Part of faith is recognizing God in a blessing and savoring God's presence in praise. Growing an eye for God's grace and rejoicing is yet another of God's gift as you walk in faith. For when you have eyes to see God's blessings, you will find it in surprising places and circumstances. You will notice it in a beautiful sunset or snow. You will notice it in the embrace and company of those you love. But you will also come to see it in the unexpected generosity of a stranger you would have usually dismissed. You will also come to see it in a family gathered around the bedside of a loved one slipping out of this world, as they share memories and whisper words of love and goodbye. You will find God's grace in circumstances not of God's making — like the in help of friends, neighbors and church members when you've had an accident or in the humor or courage of someone battling cancer. What glimmer and gift of God's love and grace we could miss without faithful eyes that stay alert and ready to be surprised.

The other nine lepers didn't do anything but what Jesus told them to do. They didn't do anything wrong but they missed something important. The one who returned recognized the moment of incredible blessing that was from God and gave voice to the wonder and thanks of such grace. In his gratitude, that Samaritan learned he was more than a disease or a foreigner or even a healed leper — he was a beloved child of God. And that “beloved-ness” would be true in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health where God would be present with blessings that sooth pain and bring joy. Amen.

Linda M Alessandri 11/25/14